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THE THEORETICAL STRUCTURE OF
NASSER'S SOCIALISM

By FAYEZ SAYEGH

THE THEORETICAL STRUCTURE OF NASSER'S SOCIALISM

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THE COMPOSITE PHENOMENON which some have chosen to call "Nasserism" is made up of several ingredients. Within the United Arab Republic, "Nasserism" is revolutionary change, republicanism, anti-feudalism, planned economic development, and socialism. In intra-Arab relations, Nasserism is a drive for integration and political unification. And, in the country's relations with the rest of the world, "Nasserism" expresses itself negatively as opposition to colonialism, "neo-colonialism", foreign military bases, and Great Power "spheres of influence"; and, positively, in Afro-Asian solidarity and "neutralism".

During the twelve years which have elapsed since he first emerged from the obscurity of the barracks to the limelight of national leadership, Nasser has made significant strides in the direction of each of these goals. Often, his role in approaching these goals has been that of a pioneer, not only in his own country but in the Arab World at large, but he has seldom strayed into zones which had not already been foreseen by many of his countrymen and other Arabs. In whatever direction he has pursued his policies – be it agrarian reform or socialism, Arab unity or neutralism – he has merely put into effect what many other Arabs before him had longed for. Corresponding to every element of "Nasserism" there had been prior Arab ideas, longings, dreams. But dreams they had remained, for the most part, until Nasser succeeded in transforming them into tangible reality. He it was who bridged the chasm separating many Arab hopes from their fulfilment; he it was who took the decisions and supervised their implementation and, in so doing, selected the means and devised the actual plans of enforcement.

By playing the historically-decisive role of realizing earlier Arab hopes, he has in effect translated disembodied ideas into concrete

realities, giving them in the process distinctive shape and specific form. For, thanks to an Arab propensity to focus on objectives as abstractions to the neglect of their contents, the form of their ultimate embodiment, and the means of their attainment, most Arab nationalist ideas had remained more or less amorphous until Nasser arrived on the scene. By providing the leadership required for the achievement of those objectives, he has also provided shape and content to the institutions and systems through which they were achieved. To Nasser as midwife, then, Arab Nationalism owes not only the bringing-into-being, but also the conceptual contents and distinguishing structural features of its principal ideas.

This is especially true of socialism as an essential element of the revolutionary Arab Nationalism which prevails in the Arab World today. Not only has Nasser fulfilled the socialist aspirations of some Arab nationalists and stimulated such aspirations in others: he has, in the process of so doing, set the style, erected the institutions, and defined the very meaning of "Arab Socialism" as well.

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Of the diverse components of "Nasserism", socialism is the most recent. It was on the ninth anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution, in July 1961, that a programme of socialization was formally launched; and it was not until the following May that the theoretical framework of Nasser's socialism was constructed and announced.

This raises some interesting questions. Was Nasser a socialist all along, from the time he planned the *coup d'état* of 1952; and was that *coup d'état* therefore designed as the beginning of a socialist revolution? If so, then why did Nasser wait nine years before embarking upon the systematic socialization of society and the state? And why had he remained for several years silent about the ultimate destination? Or was Nasser, on the other hand, a recent "convert" to socialism – who, after a period of hesitation, came at last to embrace his new ideal, and then began to apply himself to the task of transforming society in accordance with the precepts of his adopted faith with all the dynamism of his personality and the proverbial zeal of a convert? If so, then at what time was he converted, under what influences, and in response to the special appeal of what aspect or aspects of socialism? And has his conversion been complete: has his growth come to a standstill? If not, how likely is it that his growth will remain from now on within the framework of socialism, and how likely is it that he will outgrow

socialism? In what direction will the presumed future evolution of this restless man move, if it moves beyond socialism?

These questions are of more than purely historical interest. The answers may go some distance towards clarifying the nature of socialism, as Nasser understands it.

Nasser himself has given many clues to the answer. His self-analytical and autobiographical statements have been none too scarce; and he has never been wanting in candour – not infrequently to the possible chagrin of his public relations officials.

A reconstruction of the probable course of the evolution of Nasser's socialism before 1961, based on direct revelations made by him and on the known facts of his life and of his country's recent history, would challenge the rigid disjunction implicit in most of the theories advanced thus far, whether by his admirers or by his detractors. For all these theories assume that, until his moves in the direction of socialism had become clear in 1961, Nasser must have been either a socialist or a non-socialist. Such an assumption oversimplifies a complex situation. It not only overlooks the fact that there may be different degrees of commitment to a social ideal and various shades of acceptance of a theory, but also fails to take into account the dynamics of the process of actualization, through which an initial propensity towards a certain conviction (or a state of potential belief) may imperceptibly develop into actual faith in response to an untold number of possible stimuli. Especially is this relevant in the case of a pragmatic man of action, such as Nasser, whose interest in ideas is not purely theoretical but is decisively affected by their bearing upon his preoccupation with the practical tasks immediately at hand.

According to Nasser himself, when the revolution broke out in 1952, it had no doctrine, no programme, and no political organization¹ (apart from the "Free Officers", whose number did not exceed one hundred²). Typically, it was the lack of programme that caused Nasser the greatest anxiety in 1952. If he had any misgivings about the lack of doctrine or theory, he has not – as far as one can ascertain – expressed them publicly. As for his cognizance of the potentially serious effects of the lack of political organization, it was apparently tempered by a

¹ *The Charter of National Action* (hereafter referred to as: *Charter*), ch. i, iv; "Interview with the Columbia Broadcasting System Television", 25 August 1961

² *The Road to Democracy: Proceedings of the Preparatory Committee to the National Congress of Popular Powers*, Cairo, National House of Printing and Publication, n.d. (hereafter referred to as: *Committee*), p. 270.

somewhat naïve view of what it takes to create one, as is clearly demonstrated in his first attempt to do so, six months after the *coup d'état*, through the establishment of the "Liberation Organization".

The ideological (and, in particular, the programmatic) void was only one part of the situation, however. It was offset to some extent by two elements of Nasser's revolutionary apparatus of 1952: the instinctive belief in the imperativeness of "two revolutions", and the "six principles". Both elements continue to occupy a central position in his social thought.

The concept of "two revolutions", social and political, was implicit in the earliest of Nasser's public speeches. Unlike Nagib or other members of the Revolution Command Council, Nasser constantly sprinkled his speeches, from the first days of the revolution, with references to the socio-economic tasks that lay ahead. Viewed in retrospect, his speeches of 1952 and 1953 stand out from the speeches made by the other young revolutionaries: Nasser's were distinguished primarily for their constant emphasis upon the theme that the "social revolution" had yet to be launched, and that it was the true object of the "political revolution". This idea was given place of honour in *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, first published in 1953:

"Every nation on earth undergoes two revolutions: One is political, in which it recovers its right for self-government from an imposed despot, or an aggressive army occupying its territory without its consent. The second revolution is social, in which the classes of society would struggle against each other until justice for all countrymen has been gained and conditions have become stable.

"Other nations have preceded us along the path of human progress and passed through the two revolutions but not simultaneously. Hundreds of years separated the one from the other. In the case of our nation, it is going through the two revolutions together . . ." ³

The famous "six principles" expressed in fairly precise terms the general vision of the dual revolution. First intimated in the clandestine manifestoes circulated privately by the "Free Officers" before the *coup d'état* and in Nasser's speeches of the early months of the revolution, the "six principles" were incorporated into the platform of the Liberation Organization in January 1953. They were more clearly enunciated in the preamble to the Constitution of 1956; and it is in that form that they have continued to be cited ever since: "The eradication

³ Nasser, G. A., *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, Buffalo, N.Y., Economica Books, 1959 (tr. by Dar Al-Maaref, Cairo), p. 36

of all aspects of imperialism; the extinction of feudalism; the eradication of monopolies, and the control of capitalistic influence over the system of Government; the establishment of a strong national army; the establishment of social justice; and the establishment of a sound democratic society."

These "six principles" were, in Nasser's descriptive words, no more than "signposts along a difficult road" ⁴ or "banners" under which the revolution marched: ⁵ they were "neither a method of revolutionary action nor a programme for fundamental change".⁶

The confrontation of a desire to effect fundamental social change in accordance with set principles, on the one hand, with an awareness of the absence of appropriate programmes for such action on the other, sparked Nasser's search for enlightenment and guidance. In a memorable passage of *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, he describes the drama of that search and its saddening outcome.⁷ The heart of the passage lies in the observation: "We went to the men of ideas for counsel and to the men of experience for guidance, but unfortunately we did not find much of either."⁸

In the absence of a programme, Nasser felt constrained to resort to step-by-step improvisation. "We decided to proceed, nevertheless . . . We would study, in the meantime; we would diligently try to learn . . . But we would also act",⁹ he reminisced a decade later. "We had the courage, at the beginning of the revolution, to declare that we had no theory – though we did have clearly-defined principles. We declared that we would proceed, by trial and error, to construct a theory. We proceeded thus for ten years. We proceeded, by trial and error, with our experiment. We continued to say that we might make mistakes; . . . and we continued to admit that we had no theory. But, after all, we were able to act, to do something, to bring about some application . . . And, as a result, we are now heirs to an experiment and an application of some eleven years. This has furnished us with the foundation of a theory . . ." ¹⁰ That was Nasser's description of the manner in which, having despaired of the ability of the intelligentsia, traditional politicians, and political parties to furnish him with a ready-made programme, he went ahead with his social revolution, equipped with

⁴ Speech, 26 March 1964

⁵ Charter, ch. iv

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, op. cit., pp. 31–6

⁸ Ibid., p. 33

⁹ *Proceedings of the Unity Talks*, Cairo, Al-Ahram Press, 1963 (hereafter referred to as *Unity*), p. 103

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 142

nothing more than the "six principles" and the courage to experiment with alternative methods, even at the risk of making mistakes.

To conclude from this account that Nasser's progress towards the fulfilment of his objectives was haphazard and aimless would be patently wrong; but that that progress was piecemeal and gradual cannot be gainsaid. The "six principles" did, no doubt, serve as "guides" and "signposts" at every step; and every act was measured by how close it brought Nasser to those goals; but the guidance which the "six principles" provided was not sufficient to coordinate the various policies and measures or to fit them into one organic whole.

On the other hand, to conclude that – in, or shortly before, 1961 – Nasser suddenly found himself a full-fledged socialist, after nine years of wandering in an ideological no-man's-land, would be as inadequate an interpretation of the situation as would the belief that he had been a full-fledged socialist from the start.

It is certain that, at the beginning, Nasser was firmly and totally committed to the idea of a social revolution, and passionately committed to six specific revolutionary objectives; but it is no less certain that, at the same time, he was uncommitted to any specific method of implementation, any programme of action, or any blueprint of the social system within which those objectives would be attainable. In theory, at least, there were at the outset several possible forms which his ideal society could conceivably assume, and several roads he could follow in pursuit of his revolutionary objectives. But, as he progressed in his step-by-step endeavour to accomplish those objectives, the range of the possibilities of systems, structures, devices and methods was progressively narrowed; his choices became increasingly more limited. With every step he took, he was coming closer to what he would later on come to recognize as "socialism": with every step, he was becoming more and more of a socialist.

Someone may suggest that, from the very moment he chose the elimination of feudalism, the eradication of monopolies and of capitalistic control over government, and the establishment of social justice as his ultimate goals, Nasser virtually chose socialism whether or not he knew it. Such a suggestion is valid only to the extent to which it is correct to assume that in no social system other than socialism is the peasant liberated or the political power of capital curbed or social justice established; and that socialism means nothing more than the attainment of these social conditions. But the first assumption will be questioned by many non-socialists, and the second rejected by all socialists including Nasser. For the socialism to which he is now com-

mitted connotes more than the goals which, he believes, are being attained by it. It embraces also the pattern of social, economic, and political organization which is steadily taking shape in the United Arab Republic, and the system of social, inter-personal and inter-group relations which is being constructed; and, by necessity, it precludes any other patterns and systems. Aim and form have become inextricably linked together, interwoven within the organic unity of the scheme of socialism which has emerged. The post-1961 reality of the socialist U.A.R. which Nasser has shaped is a far cry from the vision he had had in 1952 – the vision of a future society, the qualities of which he could foretell and to some extent predetermine, but the configuration of which he did not foresee.

Besides its *aims* (spelled out from the beginning) and its *system* (developed for years, by trial and error, and more recently by design), Nasser's socialism now has its own *theory*. It is the kind of theory that suits a man like Nasser, who scorns abstract speculation and pure theory. Theories are meaningful to him only in their practical application. As such, they must follow application, not precede it. Extracted from past experience in order to guide future action, theories are a legitimate exercise which can also be helpful; constructed in advance of experience, or in detachment from practice, they are worthless; indeed, they may deceptively appear to be useful, and thereby become actually harmful. The antipathy of some "doctrinaire socialists" towards Nasser is clearly mutual.

Nasser's theory of socialism partakes of his anti-theoretical bias. It was constructed after the comprehensive socialization programme of July 1961 had been launched. It was designed to do no more than provide the post-1961 phase of the systematic socialization of the U.A.R. with the programme which the pre-1961 stages of the social revolution had lacked. It was no more and no less than a blueprint of the socialist society that would be built, and a programme and time-table for the construction process.

The character of the theory was portrayed by Nasser in his addresses and statements to the Preparatory Committee, convened in November 1961 in order to lay the groundwork for the National Congress of Popular Powers, which was held in May – July 1962 for the purpose of considering the draft of Nasser's socialist manifesto, the *Charter of National Action*. In his opening address, Nasser cautioned Committee-members against detaching themselves from "real problems" and engaging in "disentangling imaginary riddles": "Such riddles are one

thing, and the problems for which solutions are required are a different thing. One must not feel called upon to solve just any problem: one must rather grapple with, and seek solutions for, the real problems actually confronting the people."¹¹ At another meeting he listened to a parade of speakers discoursing on a wide range of subjects, and then commented: "I think we have strayed away from our natural course, towards definitions. I happen to have a very large number of definitions of socialism in my possession . . . We are not here for pure theories; nor must we occupy ourselves here with abstract theories. Let each of us say what he has to say; but let us all keep constantly in mind application and implementation. From our words and from implementation we can finally arrive at the theory we require. A theory is nothing but a guide to action."¹² Nasser's view of the relationship of theory to practice was expressed in the *Charter* in the following words:

"Intellectual clarity helps considerably to make the experiment a success, just as the experiment in turn enhances the clarity of thinking, and gives thought fecundity and power, enabling it to influence reality as reality influences thought. By virtue of such creative interaction, national action will have a greater chance of success."¹³

The purpose and scope of the *Charter* were determined by such views of the nature and role of theory. The document consists of a lengthy, didactic survey of the recent history of Egypt and the Arab World, including an examination of past Arab and Egyptian revolutions and the lessons that might be derived from their failures (chapters i-iv); a relatively detailed programme of action for the following decade or so,¹⁴ which is envisaged as the period of "socialist conversion" leading to the establishment of socialism (chapters v-viii); and a discussion of Arab unity (chapter ix) and foreign policy (chapter x). The preoccupation of the *Charter* with details, in its description of the ten-year programme of "socialist conversion", is in sharp contrast with the general nature of its description of the post-conversion period. Nor is this coincidental. For Nasser deems it impossible to portray, except in broad strokes, the shape of things to come a decade hence; and he pointedly refrains from presuming to determine at this stage the configuration of the socialist U.A.R. of the relatively distant future.¹⁵

¹¹ Committee, p. 38

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 189

¹³ *Charter*, ch. viii

¹⁴ *Proceedings of the National Congress of Popular Powers*, 1962 (hereafter referred to as: *Congress*), meeting of 30 May 1962

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, meeting of 26 May 1962

III

While it is the most important source for the study of Nasser's socialist ideas – being at once the most comprehensive, systematic, and authoritative expression of those ideas – the *Charter* is by no means the sole source. Other official statements include the "explanatory memoranda" attached to many of the socialist laws enacted since July 1961; the proposals on "The Political Organization of the Arab Socialist Union", submitted by Nasser to the National Congress of Popular Powers on 2 July 1962; the Statute of the Arab Socialist Union of 7 December 1962; the Unity Accord (formulated by Iraqi, Syrian and U.A.R. representatives, but largely based on the *Charter*) of 17 April 1963; and the Constitution of 25 March 1964.

Nasser's public addresses are very helpful as a supplementary source, because of the special role he usually assigns to his public speeches as a vehicle of communication with, and mobilization of, the people, and as an educational device. Moreover, these speeches – of which over fifty, delivered since July 1961, are directly relevant to the study of Nasser's socialist ideas – represent Nasser's thought in motion, as it were. Many an idea which is finally embodied in a decree or an institution, first sees the light – albeit in a provisional form – in a public address. Listening to, or reading the text of, a typical speech of Nasser's, one at times has the distinct feeling that a new idea is being born there and then. One can then follow its growth in speech after speech, until at last one feels that it has attained the status of firm conviction. One perceives it at that point joining the ranks of Nasser's other socialist ideas. No sooner does an idea reach that level of clarity and elicit that degree of assent, than it enters into the realm of reality through a new arrangement, a new law, or a new organization. Nasser's addresses therefore shed light upon the meaning of many of his socialist ideas, illuminating them in the context of their genesis and evolution against the background of the struggles and accomplishments of the revolution.

Less value, as a source of enlightenment, must be attached to Nasser's television, radio, or press interviews, particularly those granted to foreign newsmen. On the whole, neither the questions nor the answers shed new light or provide otherwise unavailable information.

Nasser is perhaps at his best in face-to-face discussion. Challenge seems to bring out his deepest thoughts. Three series of discussions, the full verbatim transcriptions of which have fortunately been published, are especially illuminating: Nasser's fifteen statements and rebuttals at

the meetings of the Preparatory Committee of the National Congress of Popular Powers (which met in November and December 1961); his twenty-eight statements and interventions at the National Congress (which was held from May to July 1962); and, above all, his vigorous participation in twenty meetings held in March and April 1963 between U.A.R. and Syrian (and sometimes Iraqi) leaders. The meaning of his socialist ideas as Nasser himself understands them cannot be fully grasped without benefit of the insights which those conversations afford.

IV

Before attempting to schematize and examine the socialist ideas of Nasser, it is advisable to place them within the larger framework of his social thought. That framework may be likened to a chain of ideas, of which every link represents a pair of realities in a state of constant interaction.

When pondering the relationship of man and society, perhaps the central problem of social philosophy, Nasser does not permit his preoccupation with the group to dim his vision of its individual components.

"Society is not an abstract conception. Society is every individual human being living on the soil of the homeland."¹⁶ "Free man is the basis of free society. He it is who builds it."¹⁷ "Neither the revolution nor the country can be strong except through the participation of all citizens."¹⁸ From these premises, it follows that man is the end of social action: the revolution and socialism aim at the well-being of the citizen. The establishment of the socialist system,¹⁹ like the establishment of democracy,²⁰ is not an end in itself, but a means. "Our socialism means the liberation of man from bondage in all its forms."²¹ "The revolution aims at facilitating the development of the individual's humanity, and ensuring for him equality and social justice."²² "When we started this revolution, we wanted to put an end to exploitation. Hence our struggle to put capital at the service of man, and to put the land at the service of man, instead of leaving man at the service of the feudalist who owns the land."²³ Small wonder that, when asked to single out the most important accomplishment of his revolution,

¹⁶ *Charter*, ch. vii

¹⁸ Speech, 27 July 1961

²⁰ *Committee*, pp. 49-50

²² Speech, 27 July 1961

¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁹ *Congress*, meeting of 26 May 1962

²¹ Speech, 22 July 1961

²³ Speech, 17 August 1961

Nasser usually points to the sense of dignity and the human and physical well-being which, he maintains, his revolution has enabled his countrymen to experience and enjoy.²⁴

But there is another side to the coin. If socialism recognizes the citizen's rights and assures him of their enjoyment, it also entails obligations which it makes certain that the individual faithfully discharges.²⁵

Just as the welfare of man and the welfare of society are interrelated and, in the final analysis, identical, so too are the liberation of the nation and the liberation of the individual, which jointly constitute the larger objective of the revolution. Unless the nation is liberated from external domination, its citizens cannot be freed from oppressive social systems and exploitation.²⁶ On the other hand, unless the liberation of the nation issues in the liberation of its citizens, the nation's freedom is incomplete, and it remains insecure. The liberation of the individual is a condition for the nation's true and abiding liberty.²⁷

Likewise, the social and political revolutions within the nation are mutually complementary. The successful consummation of the political revolution is a prerequisite of the launching of the social revolution; only the triumph of the political revolution can make possible the destruction of the feudal system and the clipping of the wings of capitalism, which are necessary if social justice and equality of opportunity are to have a chance to prevail.²⁸ But the obverse is also true. The social revolution – which is made possible by the political revolution – is also its justification, the condition of its validity, and the guarantee of its security. For, unless it sets in motion the social revolution, the political revolution forfeits its reason for being: it becomes a mere uprising, a greedy bid for power by a power-hungry clique, military or civilian.²⁹ And, furthermore, a revolution remains precarious for as long as it fails to mobilize and gain the support of the people – which is possible only if the political revolution unleashes the social revolution, for which the people longs.

The spiral process does not rest here, however. The social revolution, originally made possible by a political revolution of somewhat limited horizons, soon sets the stage for a higher phase of political revolution.

²⁴ E.g. "Interview with Columbia Broadcasting System Television" 25 August 1961; interview with R. Stephens and P. Seale, *The Observer*, 5 July 1964

²⁵ Speech, 22 July 1961

²⁶ Speech, 23 December 1961; *Committee*, pp. 21, 28; *Unity*, pp. 103, 288

²⁷ *Charter*, ch. viii

²⁸ Speech, 22 July 1961, 26 July 1961, 27 July 1961, 18 December 1961; *Committee*, p. 245

²⁹ *Charter*, ch. iv; Speech, 16 October 1961

A *coup d'état* paves the way for social changes which culminate in socialism; and socialism in turn paves the way for true democracy, socialist democracy, which is the political counterpart, the climax, and the objective of socialism.

Socialism and democracy are thus essentially intertwined. Detached from socialism, democracy is class dictatorship; its procedures and safeguards are a façade which ill conceals the exploitation of some by others, a violation of the very essence of democracy. Likewise, without democracy, socialism is incomplete and unfulfilled. The true destiny of each lies in its intimate connection with the other. Each is its authentic self only in the redeeming company of the other. For they are indeed but two facets of the same reality. "Democracy is political liberty; socialism is social liberty; the two cannot be separated. They are the two wings of true freedom, without which, or without either of which, freedom cannot soar up to the horizons of the anticipated tomorrow."³⁰

All the objectives of the revolution spelled out in his "six principles" Nasser now sums up in the following words: "To restore political freedom to the nation and to its citizens, and to ensure social freedom to the nation and its citizens."³¹

v

Socialism is the pursuit of "sufficiency", "justice", and "freedom". By "sufficiency", Nasser means the expansion of the nation's total wealth. "Justice" connotes freedom from exploitation and the enjoyment of an equal opportunity to develop one's abilities and to receive a fair share of the national wealth according to one's efforts. "Freedom" is the participation in the shaping of the nation's destiny.³²

The attainment of each of these three ideals requires certain readjustments in the existing system of social, economic and political organization, and the creation of a new system by appropriate means and devices. It is these changes, systems and means that primarily concern Nasser. Further analysis of his views on the goals, however, is necessary for fuller understanding of his choice of specific measures of social change as well as his selection of the socialist pattern as a whole.

Emphasis on *sufficiency* as an integral element of socialism is inescapable in an underdeveloped society, where poverty is endemic and the standard of living below the level demanded by the dignity of man.

³⁰ *Charter*, ch. v

³² *Charter*, ch. v; Speech, 16 October 1961

³¹ Speech, 16 October 1961

In an already developed society, sufficiency need not occupy as prominent a position in the scheme of socialist objectives.

Sufficiency entails not only the increase of production but the expansion of services as well.³³ "The true object of production is to provide the greatest amount of services."³⁴ According to the *Charter*, the principal services which socialism must provide include medical care (treatment and medicament), education, employment, and insurance against old age and sickness.³⁵

Sufficiency, in production and services, is a relative term. Its minimum magnitude may be determinable in a given socio-economic situation; but there can be no maximum, no outer limit to the socialist aspiration to attain sufficiency. Sufficiency merges imperceptibly into abundance and prosperity, as its true end. If his sights are set on mere sufficiency as the economic ingredient of the socialist objective, it is because Nasser is realistically aware of the difficulties and time involved in the thoroughgoing development of his country; and because, by virtue of his step-by-step approach to the monumental enterprise of "socialist conversion", he must for the time being focus on the task immediately ahead. Of his visions of the more distant horizons, he must allow himself at present to indulge in only passing glimpses. Besides, to encourage the people at this stage to entertain hopes which cannot in the near future be realized, is to indulge in deception and is unworthy of true leaders.³⁶

Sufficiency (and prosperity, to which it is a prelude) is justified in its own right; but it is also justified by the fact that, without it, social justice and equality of opportunity, the second goal of socialism, cannot be attained. "In proportion to the expansion of the base of production, . . . new scopes are opened, affording equal opportunities to all citizens."³⁷ To focus on social justice and on equal opportunities for a fair share of the nation's wealth, without in the meantime expanding the wealth of the nation, is in the final analysis tantamount to spreading poverty to all. Only in a more productive society can the equalization of opportunities mean their enlargement as well; and, unless in its striving for equal opportunities, socialism aims also at their enlargement as an indivisible part of the same goal, the prize is scarcely worth the price. Tirelessly, Nasser strives in his public speeches to bring this point home to his audiences.³⁸ The frequency of his reiteration of this idea, the simple terms in which he expresses it, and the imagery and the passion he brings to his elaboration of its theme and implications,

³³ *Charter*, ch. vii

³⁵ *Ibid*

³⁶ *Charter*, ch. viii

³⁷ *Charter*, ch. vi

³⁴ *Ibid*

³⁸ E.g. Speech, 1 May 1964

indicate clearly that Nasser has a genuine fear lest the masses, long deprived, should now seek quick relief: waiting passively for the redistribution of national wealth instead of vigorously contributing to its enlargement. This is not the way of socialism, he keeps telling them in endlessly varied ways; rights entail corresponding duties, and the chief beneficiaries of socialism can actually come to enjoy its promised benefits only if they apply themselves loyally to its tasks. Nasser ridicules the lazy man's socialist manual, which counsels nationalization of existing enterprises without simultaneous efforts to expand production. Nationalization without vigorous development plans neither leads to genuine socialism through sufficiency nor advances socialism through the establishment of social justice: it replaces class exploitation by state exploitation; it punishes a few, where it should aim at rewarding the many.³⁹

Only the vigorous, methodical pursuit of sufficiency, then, can make possible the establishment of social justice and meaningful equality of opportunity. But these, in turn, are a prerequisite of sufficiency: they are necessary for invigorating the pursuit of sufficiency and giving it a chance to reach its destination. A happier, healthier, better educated or more skilled farmer or worker, liberated from the oppression of the feudal master or purged of the debilitating estrangement caused by the exploitation of his employer, can apply himself with greater dedication and usefulness to the productive enterprise, to which his enjoyment of social justice gives him a sense of belonging.

"Sufficiency, i.e. increased production, without justice, means a fuller monopolization of wealth. Justice, i.e. the equitable distribution of national income, without increased production, is tantamount to the distribution of poverty and misery. But, hand in hand, they reach their objective . . ."⁴⁰

To aim at both sufficiency and justice at the same time, however, is not without its strains and problems. Three difficulties in particular frequently engage Nasser's attention.

To make goods and services available more abundantly to a larger number of formerly deprived citizens, as social justice demands, is appreciably to increase consumption; but the increase of production, in pursuit of sufficiency, requires the expansion of investments and savings and a commensurate curtailment of consumption. The means militate against one another, although the purposes are mutually complemen-

³⁹ *Unity*, pp. 182-3

⁴⁰ Speech, 26 March 1964

tary. True socialism cannot contemplate ignoring, or even temporarily suspending, either purpose in order to serve the other; yet the paucity of resources is such as to forbid the pious hope that both purposes might be adequately satisfied at the same time. To temper this sobering influence of economic reality upon his socialist idealism, Nasser resorts to planning, in the magic efficacy of which he has wellnigh unlimited faith.⁴¹ (In fact, his faith in planning antedated his faith in socialism, as his pre-socialist economic policies show.)

Planning comes readily to the rescue of socialism in another difficulty, akin to the first: the conflict between satisfaction of the needs of today's generation, and the expansion of the productive base of the economy in order that sufficiency and prosperity may be ensured for future generations. This dilemma adds the dimension of time – the sequence of the generations – to the first. It does not revolve, as does the first, around the apportionment of the country's limited resources between consumption by the present generation and savings and investments for later consumption by the same generation; rather, it raises the more fundamental question of whether the well-being of one generation should be sacrificed for the happiness of another. The choice raises questions of principle. He would – Nasser intimates – be untrue to his concept of the centrality of man in society, or to his belief that man is the end of social action, if he were to opt for the well-being of unborn generations and thereby sacrifice the happiness of the real, suffering, long-deprived men and women who compose today's generation. His choice is therefore clear. He would not countenance "sacrificing the living generation of citizens for the sake of those still unborn".⁴² So important is this decision in his view, that Nasser considers it a distinguishing feature of his socialism, setting it apart from other systems: "Other experiments of progress have realized their objectives at the expense of increasing the misery of the working people, either to serve the interests of capital or under the pressure of ideological applications which went to the extent of sacrificing whole living generations for the sake of others still unborn."⁴³ In those experiments, "extremely cruel pressure was exerted on living generations, who were deprived of all the fruit of their labour for the sake of a promised tomorrow which they could neither see nor reach".⁴⁴

Closely related to these two problems is the possible conflict between

⁴¹ *Charter*, ch. vi

⁴² *Charter*, ch. vii

⁴³ *Charter*, ch. vi; see also *Declaration of the Union Accord*, 1963 (hereafter referred to as: *Union*), "Economic and Social Constituents"

⁴⁴ *Charter*, ch. viii

the economic and the social aspects of socialism. The establishment of social justice may at times demand readjustments in the economic relationships which tend, in the short run at any rate, to diminish economic productivity and retard progress towards sufficiency. The breaking-up of large estates may be one such instance. Some of the privileges given to workers in the socialist laws of July 1961, which may seem somewhat lavish in the context of the present economy of the U.A.R., are another illustration. Once more, then, essentially harmonious objectives may be found in practice to work at cross-purposes. Choices have to be made, which, in their consequences if not in the intentions behind them, involve the priority of either the economic or the social aspect of socialism over the other. The factors governing the practical decisions called for in a given instance cannot be evaluated from the perspective of economic efficiency alone or social imperativeness alone; they can be properly seen, in relation to one another and to socialist aims as a whole, only from a transcendent socialist vantage point which encompasses in its vision the whole range of social action, including primarily economic and essentially social considerations. No *a priori* formula, determining the relative value of the economic or the social ingredients within the structure of socialism which embraces them equally, and producing a socialist yardstick by which the socialist significance of the diverse components of socialism can be measured, is possible – even assuming that Nasser's pragmatic approach to socialism permitted the search for such a formula and the employment of such a hypothetical standard of measurement. The problems raised in this context call for practical judgments passed in each instance on the merits of the case at hand – judgments in which purely technical considerations of an economic or a social character, however important in themselves, must be supplemented by the insight of the statesman. Examination of the individual choices made by Nasser thus far, however, does reveal a general trend which may be indicative of the orientation and pattern of his social thought: on the whole, social values tend to receive priority over purely economic considerations, at the present stage of the period of "socialist conversion".

Social justice demands the eradication of exploitation: the exploitation of farmers by feudal masters, of labourers by capitalist employers, and of society as a whole by the "alliance of feudalism and capitalism".

Exploitation is at its worst when it is a lasting and continuous condition, and when the victim is powerless to escape from its clutches. It is

in this form that it perpetuates itself, extending from one generation to the next. Such "hereditary exploitation" commits the gravest sin against the dignity of man: it inculcates in some of its victims hopelessness, resignation, and perhaps acceptance. Nasser waxes indignant whenever he speaks of such "hereditary exploitation", with its twin components: hereditary privilege and hereditary privation.

"Neither the law of justice nor divine law allows that wealth should be hereditary and that poverty should be hereditary; that health should be hereditary and that illness should be hereditary; that learning should be hereditary and that illiteracy should be hereditary; that human dignity should be hereditary and that human degradation should be hereditary."⁴⁵

Social justice is the enjoyment of equal opportunities: an equal opportunity for a share of the national wealth, proportionate to one's work and ability; an equal opportunity for a share of the essential services necessary for decent living; an equal opportunity for self-realization and dignity.

To strive for making the opportunities open to all citizens equal is not to assume equality among the citizens, Nasser emphasizes. As human beings and as citizens, they are entitled to equal chances to actualize their respective potentialities and to make those contributions to society of which they are capable; they must not be barred from education, or medical care, or appropriate employment, by the rigid barriers imposed by an exploitative social order or by the great disparities in fortune bequeathed by one generation to another. But, beyond the opening-up of equal opportunities for fulfilment to all citizens, socialism cannot and does not endeavour to equalize human beings who are essentially unequal in their abilities.⁴⁶

Equality of opportunity, and the eradication of hereditary and other circumstantial barriers obstructing the enjoyment of such equality mean that man, every man, shall have the chance under socialism to "determine his place in society by his own work and his own effort".⁴⁷ Moreover, "every individual should feel that his own exertion entitles him to progress and advancement".⁴⁸

In the final analysis, social justice means the "dissolution of class distinctions". In the pre-socialist era, "the son of a pasha became a pasha at birth; he was born with a golden spoon in his mouth, and grew up

⁴⁵ Speech, 16 October 1961

⁴⁶ Committee, pp. 35, 250; Speech, 22 July 1961

⁴⁷ Speech, 26 July 1961

⁴⁸ Ibid

to find the country wide open to him", while "the son of the overseer became a hired farmer on the land". Under socialism, "every individual shall have a chance and an opportunity. This is what I mean when I talk about dissolving class barriers: there shall be no pashas, no beys, no masters . . . Instead, there shall be equality and freedom for each individual in this nation."⁴⁹ "I want a society in which class distinctions are dissolved through equality of opportunities to all citizens. I want a society in which the free individual can determine his own position by himself, on the basis of his efficiency, capacity and character."⁵⁰

Just as equality of opportunity does not signify equality of abilities, so too "the dissolution of class distinctions" does not mean the dissolution of classes as such. The object of socialism is not a classless society; it is the creation of conditions in which diverse classes, each performing a valid social function, and all free from domination and exploitation, can coexist within a framework of national unity and in harmony. It is the vertical stratification of classes, so to speak, in accordance with which some are subordinate and exploited while others are dominant and exploitative, that Nasser's socialism rejects. The continued existence of classes as such (although Nasser prefers to call them "popular powers", "working powers", or "powers of the working people") is implicit in the very nature of Nasser's socialist ideal. For that ideal, to which the dissolution of class distinctions leads, is a social order in which both the *diversity* and the *harmony* of the "working powers" obtain; it is an order based on "the *alliance* of the working powers of the people", not on their *fusion*. Socialism, according to Nasser, rejects the colourless vision of classless uniformity just as forcefully as it rebels against the actuality of the hierarchical class structure of non-socialist societies. It is this feature that primarily distinguishes socialist democracy, the only "true" and "sound" democracy, from the "false" and "counterfeit" democracy which obtains under conditions of class-domination.

The "alliance of all popular powers" is the socio-political ideal of Nasser's socialism, the basis of socialist democracy. The opening words of the 1964 Constitution describe the United Arab Republic as "a democratic, socialist State based on the alliance of the working powers of the people". These working powers are defined as "the farmers, workers, soldiers, intellectuals and national capital".⁵¹

⁴⁹ Speech, 23 December 1961

⁵¹ Constitution (1964), Art. 3; see also *Union*, "Political Constituents"

⁵⁰ Speech, 16 October 1961

Misunderstandings and conflicts among these classes or "powers" cannot be excluded, even after the domination of the former exploitative classes has been brought to an end and class distinctions have been dissolved.⁵² Such misunderstandings and conflicts do not constitute class struggle or generate class warfare, however, for they can be resolved peacefully and within the framework of national unity.⁵³

The alliance of the working powers of the people is possible, despite differences among them. The alliance of the exploitative classes, feudalists and capitalists, is also possible; it is actual in pre-socialist society. But the two groups cannot coexist peacefully and on the basis of mutual respect, for by nature the alliance of feudalism and capitalism rests on domination and exploitation of the working powers of the people. Divided, these working powers submit, however resentfully, to the dominance of the exploitative classes. But the submission is always potentially explosive; and, unless political revolution rids society of the control of the alliance of feudalism and capital over the government and over the nation as a whole, the restiveness of the subdued classes must sooner or later express itself in class struggle and class warfare. The ominous threat of civil war and bloodshed is ever present. It is lifted only when the social revolution, made possible by the destruction of the dominance of the exploitative alliance by political revolution, proceeds to create social justice and construct an alliance of all the working powers of the people. Social peace, then, as well as social justice, is the promise of socialism: actual injustice and potential civil war are what the social system based on the exploitation and domination of the alliance of feudalism and capitalism offers. Socialism, through the justice and peace it provides, makes true democracy possible and prepares the ground for it; the alliance of capitalism and feudalism makes democracy impossible, notwithstanding the façade of quasi-democratic institutions and processes which it maintains. "He who monopolizes and controls the fortunes of farmers and workers can, in consequence, monopolize and control their votes as well, and impose his will upon them. The freedom of the loaf of bread is an indispensable guarantee of the freedom of the vote."⁵⁴ "Political democracy cannot be separated from social democracy . . . Political democracy cannot exist under the domination of any one class."⁵⁵

But socialism, Nasser insists, does not aim at replacing the exploitative alliance of capitalism and feudalism by the exploitative domination of any other class or alliance of classes. It is not the purpose of socialism to substitute one exploitation for another. The domination of any one

⁵² *Charter*, ch. v

⁵³ *Ibid*

⁵⁴ *Charter*, ch. iv

⁵⁵ *Charter*, ch. v

class – be it capital or labour, feudalism or the farmers – is incompatible with socialism and true democracy. The domination of one class, or one alliance of classes, is *class dictatorship*, whatever the identity of the dominant group. For wherever one class or some classes lord it over the rest, there is dictatorship, which Nasser defines as the rule of some over all, in the interest of the rulers. Only where all working powers jointly participate in the councils of the nation and determine its policies within a framework of all-embracing national unity does democracy, the rule of all the people, obtain.⁵⁶

"We are pledged to the establishment of a new socialist experience in our country, based on love and brotherhood and not on the domination of any one class, whatever name it may take . . . If we declare that we will not allow capitalism or feudalism to return, because they represent the rule of a minority, the rule of one class, we also declare that we will not allow the dictatorship of the proletariat, as envisaged by communism, because that too means the domination of a particular group over all . . . Our socialism, which rejects the rule of one class, shall not fall under the domination of any class . . . A small group of people cannot be allowed to monopolize the political scene, whether in the present or in the future: political action belongs to all the people."⁵⁷

Nor does socialism aim at liquidating those *individuals* whose domination, as a *class* or an *alliance of classes*, it feels constrained to destroy. Describing the measures taken at the final stage of "liquidating the alliance of reaction and imperialism as well as liquidating their inherited privileges" (beginning in the autumn of 1961), and reporting the end of that phase of internal policy, Nasser told the new National Assembly at its first meeting:

"There was no enmity towards any individual or family. I sincerely say to you that I hesitated for a long time before signing the decree imposing sequestration upon a number of individuals from this class . . . I was fully alive to the fact that they were human beings, in addition to their being a class. My aim was to liquidate the class but in such a way that the dignity of every member and his right to live would be safeguarded, as long as he performed his national duty. I tried my best to mitigate the effects of this change upon them. But I rightly considered that the law of justice must take its course . . .

" . . . We were not against individuals. We were opposed to class

⁵⁶ Charter, ch. v

⁵⁷ Speech, 18 December 1961

distinction. It was our right to eliminate its effects. But it was not our right to eliminate the dignity and humanity of individuals."⁵⁸

Socialism, according to Nasser, aims at emancipating the exploited and safeguarding their rights, not at inflicting retribution on former exploiters or taking revenge on past oppressors:

"We have decided to put the social revolution into effect, and to restore rights to their owners. We have also decided to be generous and not to avenge ourselves for the past. We have decided to treat with clemency those who had treated us inhumanly . . . We have not deprived them of their wealth or of their property, but have compensated them generously . . . Neither have we reduced them to a class of destitutes, as they had done to us in the past. (For this people is generous, merciful, and forgiving . . .) They are still – after all the measures we have taken – in a more favourable position than that of 95 per cent of the people."⁵⁹

"These revolutionary measures [of July 1961] have not been taken in a spirit of revenge. They have been taken to ensure equity. And they do ensure fair play even towards those who have been directly affected by them. For, although we could have resorted to confiscation, we have not. Because equity is our objective, and it is not in our nature to wreak vengeance. In issuing these laws, we did not recall what the farmer had suffered . . .

"Animated by a spirit of toleration and justice, our people were reluctant to take revenge. However, they were determined to gain their legitimate rights. They sought a fair deal, not only for themselves but for others also.

"For hundreds of years, our fellow countrymen suffered political oppression and social injustice . . . When they found an opportunity to regain their rights, they were generous and just. They maintained national unity . . . They did not indulge in retaliation against those who had maltreated them . . ."⁶⁰

"Farmers have been turned into landowners . . . Workers have also been turned into owners, for they now take part in the administration of their firms. But the others have not been made destitute. For our people are good by nature."⁶¹

It is not upon hatred, but on love and compassion, that socialism is based:

"We did not say that the working class would defeat the other

⁵⁸ Speech, 26 March 1964

⁵⁹ Speech, 26 July 1961

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Ibid

class, destroy it, and expropriate its wealth. That is not our socialism . . . We shall build our country within the framework of national unity, and on love.”⁶²

Nasser takes pride in the bloodlessness of his revolution. We pledged ourselves, he says, to achieve socialism “by peaceful means, without civil war, without bloodshed, and without taking revenge upon any class”.⁶³

“We had to disarm the class which had controlled us. But we did so in our own way – the peaceful way, without bloodshed – a way which is in line with our nature and with Arab traditions.”⁶⁴

That such far-reaching changes have already been attained by peaceful means, says Nasser, is the strongest refutation of the scepticism, voiced by some, concerning the possibility of bloodless socialism. It also demonstrates that the remaining goals can be attained by means equally peaceful. The peaceful tasks of socialism must not be sought through means incompatible with their nature. In this resolution to eschew injustice in the process of realizing justice, declares Nasser, lies the uniqueness of his socialism:

“The socialist revolution which is raging today within this Republic is not a simple event; it is a great event. For we are realizing socialism in a manner which stems from our own will, and by means which match our own nature. We are realizing social justice, and are working towards eliminating class distinctions, by peaceful means and without violence.

“Some people thought this would be impossible. They thought that the capitalist class must be crushed by violence. Yet we have proved that our aim was practicable. We have succeeded in eradicating feudalism, in destroying the dictatorship of capital, and in establishing social justice, entirely by peaceful means.”⁶⁵

“I say that this revolution is a new kind of revolution in history . . . Ours has been a white revolution.”⁶⁶

VI

The institutions, devices and procedures to which Nasser resorts in order to give embodiment to his socialist ideas are, in a manner of speaking, part of those ideas. For, to Nasser, social thought cannot be

⁶² Speech, 22 July 1961

⁶⁵ Speech, 17 August 1961

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁶ Speech, 26 July 1961

separated from social reality. Their incarnation in reality, and the shape they acquire in the process of their embodiment, is the true meaning of social ideas.

Like Nasser's socialist ideas, the institutions and devices of socialism are partly economic, partly social, and partly political. Each has implications for, and produces ramifications in, all three fields. Strict compartmentalization is impossible.

Development of the national economy, with a view to the attainment of sufficiency and the facilitation of the establishment of social justice, calls for the “pooling of national savings”, the use of “modern sciences”, and the drawing-up of an “overall plan”. Planning requires the “existence of a highly efficient organization, capable of mobilizing the forces of production, raising their material and mental efficiency, and relating them to the production process”. The centralization of planning must go hand in hand with the decentralization of implementation, however, in order to secure as wide public participation and supervision as possible.⁶⁷

Planning presupposes that “the people should control all means of production”. But public control does not necessarily require public ownership: it “does not necessarily require the nationalization of all means of production, the abolition of private ownership, or encroachment upon the legitimate right to inheritance following therefrom”. The people's control of means of production can be achieved in two ways: “the creation of a capable public sector that would . . . bear the main responsibility for the development plan”, and the continued “existence of a private sector that would, without exploitation, participate in the development within the framework of its overall plan”.

The *Charter* defines the lines of demarcation between the two sectors. By the end of the ten-year “conversion period”, public ownership shall have embraced all the “principal structures of the production process” (including railways, roads, ports, airports, and dams; all means of transportation by sea, land, or air; and other public utilities); all banks and insurance companies; “the majority of heavy, medium, and mining industries”; all import trade, “about three quarters” of the export trade, and “about one-quarter” of internal trade. The private sector may have a minor share of heavy, medium, and mining industries; an unspecified but presumably substantial share of light industry; about a quarter-share of the export trade; and three-quarters

⁶⁷ *Charter*, ch. vi; *Constitution* (1964), Article 10; *Union*, “Social and Economic Constituents”

of internal trade – provided that, in all these areas, no monopolistic control by private interests is exercised; and that the performance of private owners, always subject to the control of the people, remains non-exploitative in character. Rural land will remain under private ownership, and so will buildings – although private ownership in these areas (as in trade and industry) may be cooperative as well as individual, and some measure of public housing is also envisaged. Private ownership of land, as ownership of any other category of productive property, shall always be subject to public control. Agrarian reform laws have already put maximum limits on land-holdings; and rent control, along with competition by public and cooperative housing, guarantees that ownership of buildings shall not be exploitative.⁶⁸

In terms of their original ownership, four ingredients of the public sector may be distinguished: elements originally owned by the state in the pre-revolutionary period; formerly foreign-owned interests, "egyptianized" by the revolutionary government from 1956 onwards; former holdings of private, national capital, which were nationalized (wholly or in part) by the revolution, chiefly in July 1961, August 1963, and March 1964; and industries and other businesses established by the revolution, principally since 1957, within the framework of successive development plans, and assigned from their inception to the public sector.

Nationalization has been the principal device for bringing formerly existing private firms into the public sector. Nasser has spoken at great length about nationalization, as often to explain what it is not as to define what it is. As he conceives it, nationalization is not an end in itself; it does not, by itself, signify socialist intent or create socialism.⁶⁹ Within the context of Nasser's socialism, nationalization signifies the transfer of ownership to the people: from one or a few to all. It broadens rather than narrows the base of ownership. It is a means for facilitating public control of the vital tools of production, and for orienting their performance and directing the investment of the net profits realized by them in accordance with the development plan. Nationalization also facilitates the enforcement of such working regulations, profit-sharing arrangements, minimum-wage provisions, insurance provisions, and other safeguards of social justice as the state may choose not to require the private sector to enforce. In addition to these

⁶⁸ *Charter*, ch. vi; *Constitution* (1964) Articles 12–17; *Union*, "Social and Economic Constituents"

⁶⁹ *Unity*, pp. 102, 182–3

economic and social purposes, nationalization also serves the political aims of socialism. By removing the ownership of vital means of production from the hands of a few, the socialist government removes the means by which their former owners had wielded undue influence upon society and the state – thus disarming and dethroning capitalism and destroying its political power, as agrarian reform measures had disarmed feudalism and destroyed its political power. In this respect, nationalization – which economically leads to the attainment of sufficiency and socially fosters social justice – is seen as also an important weapon wielded by socialism in its political battle against the alliance of the exploitative classes.

But nationalization must be distinguished from confiscation, says Nasser. Nationalization is accompanied by provisions for fair compensation; confiscation, a punitive or retaliatory measure, is not.⁷⁰ The socialist Constitution of 1964 prohibits confiscation, and stipulates that "expropriation", permitted only when required "for the general good", shall be "against a fair compensation in accordance with the law".⁷¹

Nasser's socialism is thus not incompatible with private property, so long as such property is not used exploitatively; "private ownership is safeguarded and the law organizes its social function".⁷² The 1964 Constitution recognizes private ownership, as one of the three forms which ownership may assume under socialism, the other two being state ownership and cooperative ownership.⁷³ As Nasser often points out,⁷⁴ agrarian reform – whether before or after the advent of socialism – did not entail nationalization of the land expropriated from feudal ownership; instead, it called for re-distribution of that land, so that hundreds of thousands of citizens, formerly non-owners, became private land-owners for the first time in their lives. And land reclaimed by the state has also been distributed to non-owning farmers, thus expanding the number of land-owners in the country. "The right solution to the problems of agriculture does not lie in transferring land to public ownership. It requires the existence of individual ownership of land, and the expansion of such ownership by extending the right to own land to the largest number of wage-earners."⁷⁵ During the Cairo "unity talks" of March–April 1963, Nasser strongly opposed suggestions by some Ba'athist socialists from Iraq and Syria for introducing "collective farms" into the proposed union under the banner of social-

⁷⁰ Speech, 22 July 1961, 26 July 1961; *Congress*, meeting of 30 May 1962

⁷¹ *Constitution* (1964), Article 16

⁷² *Ibid*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Article 13

⁷⁴ E.g., Speech, 27 July 1961; *Congress*, meeting of 30 May 1962

⁷⁵ *Charter*, ch. vii

ism. He even opposed "cooperative farms" (which entail cooperative ownership of the land involved), although he was willing to endorse the practice of "cooperative farming" which coordinated the efforts of the farmers while leaving land-ownership in private hands. He indicated that, while "collective farms" and "cooperative farms" may be valid in terms of socialist principles in general, they were not valid in terms of U.A.R. socialism, determined as it was to enable increasing numbers of farmers to become landowners.⁷⁶

The formal début of U.A.R. socialism in July 1961, in addition to nationalizing numerous private establishments, also introduced statutory changes affecting the status of workers. The omnibus "July laws", as they have come to be called, and subsequent socialist legislation have given workers and employees representation on the boards of directors of the companies by which they are employed (currently four out of nine seats); assigned them a fixed proportion (25 per cent) of the profits of those companies; fixed minimum wages and maximum hours of work (42 hours in a six-day week); and defined other work conditions.

Along with progressive taxation, these measures were designed to perform the obvious economic functions they indicate: increasing the share of workers in the nation's wealth, and narrowing the economic gap between the classes. But they also aimed at other objectives, social in nature. These were perhaps more important for the fulfilment of the socialist aspirations of Nasser, and more immediate in their results. Thus, in Nasser's view, the participation of workers in the management was a significant milestone in the steady progress towards social justice and the removal of class barriers.

Although they represented progress in the realization of the economic and social aims of socialism, the July laws marked no direct progress towards achieving the political aims. They created none of the devices or institutions of "socialist democracy". The second phase of the political revolution, for which the social revolution sets the stage, had yet to be launched.

Within less than four months, however, the process of establishing "socialist democracy" was under way. It was set in motion on 4 November 1961, in a statement which described the steps and timetable of the plan in accordance with which the precise nature of "socialist democracy" would be defined and its institutions founded.

It will be recalled that, between July and November, the U.A.R.

⁷⁶ *Unity*, pp. 310-11

experienced an important event, which was destined to affect significantly the future course of the country's socialist evolution, namely, the secession of Syria on 28 September. This event was immediately interpreted by Nasser as a direct reaction by Syrian feudalism and capital to the establishment of socialism in the Republic. In his view, Syria's secession was a tragic but eloquent demonstration of the undying resistance of "reaction" to socialism. Thus interpreted, it produced two immediate results. The first was Nasser's determination that there could be but one response to the resistance of "reaction" to socialism: more socialism, more expeditiously established. And the second consequence of Syria's secession was to sharpen Nasser's awareness of the vulnerability of socialism, during the early formative stages of "socialist conversion", to such counter-revolutionary attacks as a desperate reaction may be tempted to launch before its final collapse. This conviction crystallized into the doctrine of the "protection of the revolution", namely, that the socialist revolution must protect itself by completely disarming feudalism and capital. This doctrine was to play a decisive role in shaping (and rationalizing) some of the most controversial features of Nasser's "socialist democracy", notably the device of "political isolation of reactionaries". While it is idle to speculate on the form which "socialist democracy" might have taken had the secession of Syria occurred just a few months earlier (i.e. before the July laws) or later (i.e. after the formulation of the programme of building "socialist democracy" was completed), it is not unimportant to keep in mind the actual sequence of events when examining the political system blueprinted at that time, in order the better to understand some of the ideas behind it.

The lessons derived by Nasser from the secession of Syria, and the bearing of that event upon his socialist ideas, were expounded in his speeches of the autumn of 1961, in the statements he made before the Preparatory Committee (in November and December, 1961) and the National Congress of Popular Powers (in May, June and July 1962), and in his talks with Syrian Ba'athist leaders at five meetings held on 19, 20 and 21 March 1963 (forming the intermediate stage of the Cairo "unity talks" of March-April 1963).

The process of building the political institutions of socialism was relatively long by Nasser's standards. It lasted from 4 November 1961 until 26 March 1964. And it was distinguished in the modern history of the country for the intensive discussion, the free public debate, and the methodical consultation procedures which characterized it. It was in sharp contrast with the launching of the social revolution, when the

July laws were announced without prior notification of, let alone consultation with, the National Assembly.⁷⁷

The process of building the institutions of "socialist democracy" was, in some respects, an illustration of that brand of democracy in action. Reminding the Preparatory Committee that the first political revolution had been launched in 1952 without prior consultation of the people and that the social revolution had also been inaugurated in July 1961 without public consultation,⁷⁸ Nasser declared that the second political revolution – the revolution of "socialist democracy" – demanded by its very nature that the people participate, directly and through their representatives, in the deliberations and decisions. A democracy built without wide public participation in the building-process, he believed, was a contradiction in terms.⁷⁹

Maximum publicity was given to the discussions of the Preparatory Committee and the National Congress. In accordance with Nasser's announcement of 4 November 1961, the discussions of both bodies took place "in open and public sessions".⁸⁰ The full proceedings of all meetings were directly transmitted from the meeting-hall to the whole country by "live" telecasts and broadcasts. They were re-broadcast in full, several times each. And the full, verbatim transcriptions were published in the daily press. By and large, the members' contributions were not unequal to the occasion, whether in the intellectual quality of their contents or in the freedom with which they expressed dissent or criticism.

The Preparatory Committee, which convened on 25 November and adjourned on 31 December 1961, was composed of 250 members selected by Nasser from different walks of life. Its chief task was to advise him on the composition of the forthcoming National Congress, which was to be an elective body representing all "popular powers" in the country.⁸¹ Besides the apportionment of the Congress's seats among different "popular powers", however, the Committee's task involved matters of principle and high state policy, upon the determination of which the nature of the emergent system of "socialist democracy" might depend. Two crucial questions, in particular, had to be faced: how wide, or how narrow, an interpretation of "popular powers" should the Committee make; and how high a barrier should it erect in the way of participation in the proposed institutions of

⁷⁷ Committee, p. 245

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61, 68–9, 648–9

⁸⁰ Statement on "Steps Co-ordinating Popular Action", 4 November 1961

⁸¹ *Ibid.*; and Committee, pp. 648–9

"socialist democracy", by those whom the Committee would judge to be outside the pale of "popular powers"?

The National Congress of Popular Powers consisted of 1,500 elected members. (By Presidential Decree, the 250 members of the Committee were seated in the Congress, in addition to the elected members.)⁸² In accordance with the Committee's recommendations, the elected members of the Congress consisted of 375 representatives of farmers; 300, workers; 150, national capital (private industry and commerce); 225, syndicates and professional organizations; 135, employees not organized in unions; 105, faculty members of the universities; 105, students; and 105, women's organizations.⁸³

In fourteen meetings held between 21 May and 4 July 1962, the Congress considered two drafts submitted by Nasser: the "Charter of National Action" and "Political Organization of the Arab Socialist Union". A special committee of the Congress, set up to report on the *Charter*, recommended its adoption but produced also a document of its own called "Report on the *Charter*", which was adopted by the Congress along with the *Charter* itself. The "Report on the *Charter*" was an abbreviated version of the *Charter*, somewhat more systematically organized than the original. In addition, it contained sections on some questions which Nasser had left undefined and on which he had requested the Congress to advise him – such as the definition of "workers" and "farmers", for whom at least half of the seats of all elective institutions were to be reserved. The "Report on the *Charter*" also contained some modifications of the original. One fundamental modification took the form of a whole new chapter devoted to the subject of "Religion and Society", a subject to which the *Charter* had made only passing references. There were some minor modifications also, not the least important of which was the pointed deletion of any reference to the investment of foreign private capital in the socialist state (a practice which the *Charter* had conditionally condoned as a necessary evil).

The period of transition towards "socialist democracy", which witnessed the establishment of the Preparatory Committee and the National Congress, witnessed also the establishment of other temporary bodies, marking progress towards democratic life. In accordance with the principle of "collective leadership" (which the *Charter* described as indispensable for curbing the excesses of individual leaders, for the affirmation of democracy at the highest levels, and for ensuring permanent continuity),⁸⁴ a Constitutional Proclamation was issued on

⁸² Presidential Decree, 17 January 1962, Art. 1

⁸⁴ *Charter*, ch. v

⁸³ Committee, p. 591

27 September 1962 establishing, among other things, a Presidential Council, which was to represent the "supreme authority of the State"⁸⁵ until the adoption of a permanent constitution. The Presidential Council, in effect, was to be a substitute for the National Assembly (dissolved since the secession of Syria) until a new Assembly, based on new foundations of "socialist democracy", was elected in March 1964.

Unlike the three provisional institutions mentioned in the foregoing paragraphs, the new National Assembly was one of the two permanent bodies which emerged from the search and consultation of the transitional period under discussion, the other being the Arab Socialist Union.

The Assembly is an elective body of 350 members representing 175 constituencies. (The Constitution empowers the President to appoint a number of additional members, not exceeding ten,⁸⁶ in order apparently to ensure that some minorities, which might otherwise have no representation, could have some seats in the Legislature). Three features distinguish the Assembly as an instrument of "socialist democracy" and illustrate some of Nasser's ideas on this subject: Membership in the Arab Socialist Union is a prerequisite of eligibility for candidature for the Assembly.⁸⁷ In the Assembly, as in the Union, "half of the members, at least, shall be from among workers and farmers" as defined in the "Report on the Charter" adopted by the National Congress on 30 June 1962.⁸⁸ (Among the members of the present Assembly, elected in March 1964, are 114 farmers and 75 workers, both groups together constituting 54 per cent of the total membership). The third feature is implicit in the first: for the duration of the period of "socialist conversion", or at least for as long as the socialist experiment remains in need of "protection" against the infiltration of "reactionaries", candidature shall remain barred to individuals who are subject to "political isolation", inasmuch as such individuals are barred from membership in the Union, as we shall see in the sequel.

The Arab Socialist Union represents Nasser's latest attempt to establish a popular organization through which the leadership of the State could have a popular base and by means of which a two-way process of communication could be conducted; but it is Nasser's first such attempt since the advent of socialism. The "Liberation Organization", established on 23 January 1953, was a formless body hastily contrived

⁸⁵ Article 1 (b) and Articles 8-12

⁸⁶ Constitution (1964), Article 49

⁸⁷ Law on the National Assembly, 1963 (hereafter referred to as: *Assembly*).

Article 5 (s)

⁸⁸ Constitution (1964), Article 49; *Assembly*, Articles 1, 2, and 13-15

to fill the void created by the dissolution of political parties a week earlier. It was a clumsy creature which died in infancy, hardly anyone knowing exactly when or how, or caring to know. The second attempt was called the "National Union". The Constitution of 1956 stipulated that, until a law regulating the re-establishment of political parties was enacted, "a National Union will be established by the people to work for the realization of the aims of the Revolution, and to muster all efforts for the sound building of the nation in political, social, and economic matters".⁸⁹ Upon the unification of Egypt and Syria in February 1958, the pattern was extended to the Syrian Region: political parties were dissolved; and a branch of the National Union was set up. The Provisional Constitution of the United Arab Republic, promulgated in 1958, provided that "citizens shall constitute a National Union to work for the realization of national aims and the intensification of the national efforts for raising a sound national structure, from the political, social, and economic standpoints".⁹⁰ But the experiment proved a failure, for reasons which Nasser, in a post-secession autopsy, reduced to one main shortcoming: a non-socialist organization, embracing in its comprehensive unity both the reactionary elements of capitalism and feudalism and the progressive working powers of the people, could not serve as a fitting vessel for socialism nor lead a socialist revolution aiming at destroying the domination of one of the groups represented within it. The Arab Socialist Union, the third experiment, would therefore avoid the mistakes of its two predecessors. It would have a "theory" (the *Charter*, described as "the proper theory of our Revolution and the revolutionary ideology for the application of our socialism"⁹¹); it would be carefully organized; and it would be closed to the "reactionary elements" who do not belong to the "working powers of the people".

The intention to form the Arab Socialist Union was first announced by Nasser in his proclamation of 4 November 1961, which ushered in the period of transition to "socialist democracy". It was envisaged in that statement as "the highest popular authority in the country which, in this capacity, will decide the method of planning a permanent constitution for the U.A.R.". In the light of the discussions of the Preparatory Committee and the National Congress, Nasser formulated a set of proposals which summed up his conception of the forthcoming Union.

⁸⁹ Constitution (1956), Article 192

⁹⁰ Provisional Constitution of the United Arab Republic (1958), Article 72

⁹¹ Statute of the Arab Socialist Union, 1962 (hereafter referred to as: *Statute*), "Introduction"

Submitted to the Congress on 2 July 1962, the proposals were considered and approved by the Congress at its final meeting on 4 July. In the statement outlining his proposals, Nasser described the Union as "the equivalent of the nervous system" in the body of the socialist, democratic society; and viewed it as the "political framework for mass action by the alliance of popular powers", the "living embodiment of the authority of the people, which transcends and directs all other authorities on all levels", and the guardian of "the safeguards and guarantees of sound democracy" spelled out in the *Charter*.⁹²

Authorized by the Congress so to do, Nasser established the Supreme Executive Committee of the Arab Socialist Union on 28 September 1962. Headed by him, this Committee was designed to bring the Union into being in accordance with the proposals already approved by the Congress. The Statute of the Arab Socialist Union was then proclaimed by the Supreme Committee on 7 December 1962 – just over thirteen months after the intention to create the Union was first announced.

The Statutes conceive of the Union as "the formation embracing all the popular powers – farmers, workers, soldiers, intellectuals, and holders of national capital" and "representing the alliance" of all these powers. Its functions are seen as those of "the socialist vanguard" which "leads the people, expresses their will, directs national action, and undertakes effective control of the progress of such action, within the framework of the principles of the *Charter*". It is therefore the supreme instrument of "socialist democracy": its aims are to ensure "that the Revolution will be by the people, insofar as its methods are concerned, and for the people in its objectives"; and "to realize a socialist revolution, that is, a revolution of the working people".⁹³

The 1964 Constitution registers the elevation in status which the Union had come to enjoy, in relation to all other State institutions and in comparison with its predecessor, the "National Union", in Nasser's mind. The Arab Socialist Union is given a position of honour in Part I, of which Article 3 describes the Union as "the power representing the people, realizing the revolution's potentialities, and protecting the values of sound democracy". (In the 1958 Provisional Constitution, the "National Union" was relegated to the penultimate article; and, in 1956, it appeared in the 192nd article of the Constitution's 196 articles.)

The Union has a pyramidal structure. Basic units are set up in villages or village-equivalents, i.e. factories, schools, city-quarters, or business establishments. The second level is the *markaz*, the administra-

⁹² Congress, meeting of 2 July 1962

⁹³ Statute, "Introduction"

tive division that consists of a group of related basic units. The third level, the governorate, is the major administrative division of the State. And the fourth level is the national. At each level there is a conference (or congress) and a committee. The conference of the basic unit consists of all its members; the committee is elected by the conference. Committee-members of all basic units within a *markaz* constitute the congress of that *markaz*; and they elect the *markaz* committee. By a similar procedure, the congress and committee of the governorate are organized; they in turn lead to the national organization, which consists of a General National Congress (the Union's supreme authority, having a six-year term and convening once every two years in regular sessions, or in extraordinary sessions) and a General Committee (the highest authority during the intervals between sessions of the Congress).

Nasser takes pains to explain that the Arab Socialist Union is not a political party, and that "socialist democracy" is not a one-party system.⁹⁴ During the period of "socialist conversion", indeed, no political parties are countenanced, as will be seen in the sequel. If political parties emerge afterwards, however, they will arise within the framework of the Union and not outside it. For outside the working powers of the people there is nothing but the political wilderness. Nasser's reasons for barring political parties, as indeed for other special features of "socialist democracy" during the period of "socialist conversion" (such as "political isolation" and the restrictions on political opposition and criticism, and the stipulation that at least half of the members of all elective bodies shall be workers and farmers), must be examined in the context of Nasser's views on the exigencies of the "conversion" stage and the requirements of "protecting" the socialist revolution.

VII

A socialist society is not built overnight. A time-consuming process of "socialist conversion" is required for bridging the chasm separating a pre-socialist society from its socialist successor. The *Charter*, Nasser's programme for such transformation, is predicated on the belief it will take approximately ten years.⁹⁵

Socialist laws and institutions, by themselves, do not signify the actual immanence of socialism. They herald it; they facilitate it; and

⁹⁴ *Unity*, pp. 87, 88, 165–6, 284–5, 291–4

⁹⁵ *Charter*, ch. v; *Congress*, meetings of 26 May and 30 May 1962

they perhaps hasten its coming into being. But, in order to become a living reality, they require dedicated effort and the mobilization of the people. In announcing the "July laws", Nasser said: "A revolutionary act has been completed . . . What we now need is a revolutionary interaction. The revolutionary creation has started. What we require is revolutionary growth. The law has been enacted and proclaimed; but a revolutionary law must bring about a revolutionary life."⁹⁶ As for the mobilization of the people for revolutionary work, the chosen instrument, the Arab Socialist Union, has now been created for the purpose.

Work and mobilization would be all that was required for the eventual fulfilment of socialism, were it being established in a society where opposition was less than fierce and where resistance was feeble. Under normal horticultural conditions, the gardener prepares the soil, plants the seed, waters the plant – and waits for the flowers to bloom in good time. Nature takes care of the rest. Where the elements are hostile or where weeds encroach upon the seedling from all sides, however, the gardener must supplement the normal methods of care by special methods of protection. At times, there may be no hope for the plant to grow save in the protective sanctuary of a greenhouse. In a society in which feudalism and capitalism were until recently entrenched, and where their residual power remains formidable even after the enactment of the first socialist laws and the establishment of the first institutions, special measures for protecting socialism, during its formative period of growth, against counter-revolutionary dangers, are necessary.

His instinctive distrust of the "reactionary alliance of the exploitative classes", and his experiences during the first nine years of his rule, were perhaps enough to predispose Nasser in any case to assume that the need to protect socialism existed, even before it actually arose. But the secession of Syria removed whatever trace of doubt he might have had, and confirmed his darkest suspicions. It sharpened his awareness of the need, intensified his resolve to satisfy it, furnished him with an ideal opportunity to give doctrinal expression to what might have otherwise remained an intuitive perception, and, above all, constrained him to adopt more severe methods for "protecting socialism" than he might have chosen under different circumstances.

In theory, there were three methods he could employ. He could resort to what he had described as the political equivalent of the military concept of "preventive war"; he could proceed to disarm the enemy;

⁹⁶ Speech 26 July 1961

or he could channel his energies towards the immunization of the socialist institutions, thereby fortifying socialism from within.

True to his resolve to keep his revolution "white" and to eschew bloodshed, Nasser rejected the strategy of "preventive warfare".⁹⁷ But he chose to pursue the two remaining courses simultaneously. For disarming the enemies of socialism,⁹⁸ he turned to three devices, none of which was entirely new to his régime: the "isolation" of "reactionary elements"; the banning of political parties; and the restriction of political opposition and criticism. And, for the immunization of socialism, he adopted a novel method, which has since become an essential component of his socialism, namely, the reservation of at least half of the seats of any elective institution for the representatives of farmers and workers. All these methods were to be explained and defended with conviction, in terms of the doctrine of the "protection of the socialist revolution".

This doctrine, as Nasser expounds it, rests on several premises. The first of these is that "reaction" is not dead; it is still virulent.⁹⁹ Its domination over society and control of the state have been destroyed by the social revolution; but it continues to exercise residual influence and to possess greater potential power.¹⁰⁰ It can still count on getting help from kindred "reactionary elements" in other Arab countries, and from imperialism.¹⁰¹ Even when it appears to resign itself to its fate, it is only feigning acquiescence.¹⁰² Its pretence should not be allowed to deceive vigilant socialists, who should beware of lowering their guard. For, by nature, "reaction" must seek to dominate and exploit.¹⁰³ Its pretences in the past – by which Nasser admits himself to have been deceived¹⁰⁴ – have invariably proved to be but treacherous feints of acceptance of coexistence with the social revolution.¹⁰⁵ Witness the Syrian secession: had not Nasser personally forgiven, and overlooked the feudal or capitalist status of the very people who have now conspired to pull Syria away from the U.A.R.? And had he not

⁹⁷ Committee, p. 251

⁹⁸ Charter, ch. v; Congress, meeting of 26 May 1962; *Unity*, p. 161

⁹⁹ Charter, ch. vi

¹⁰⁰ Committee, pp. 275–6; *Unity*, pp. 88–9

¹⁰¹ *Unity*, p. 161; Speech, 2 October 1961

¹⁰² Congress, meeting of 26 May 1962; Speech, 2 October 1961, 16 October 1961

¹⁰³ *Unity*, p. 89

¹⁰⁴ Committee, pp. 22–4; Congress, meeting of 26 May 1962; Speech, 2 October 1961, 5 October 1961, 16 October 1961

¹⁰⁵ *Unity*, p. 287

allowed them to join the National Union and rise to positions of supreme responsibility in it, while all along they were plotting the secessionist coup.¹⁰⁶ And, was it not a fact that, as soon as the Syrian secession occurred, Egyptian "reaction", fancying that its own chance had come, poised itself to swoop down on fledgeling socialism?¹⁰⁷ Frustrated in its endeavour to recapture its lost position of exploitative dominance by frontal attack on the socialist revolution, "reaction" will henceforth try to reach the same goal by different means. It will from now on resort to the stratagem of infiltration into socialist institutions, in order to corrupt or debilitate or subvert the socialist system from within. It had successfully infiltrated into popular organizations created by the revolution once before, taking advantage of the revolution's tolerance and joining the ranks of the National Union, and virtually destroying its effectiveness.¹⁰⁸ That it will try to do again, by seeking admission to membership in the Arab Socialist Union and election to the National Assembly; and that, it must not be allowed to do. Whoever has, or may be presumed to have, a stake in the failure or defeat of socialism and an interest in the restoration of the *status quo ante*, must be kept away from the new socialist institutions, by "exclusion" from socialist political action or even by "isolation" from political life altogether.¹⁰⁹

The definition of the elements that must be isolated and the determination of the means by which their isolation could be accomplished were among the tasks assigned to the Preparatory Committee.

The Committee recommended,¹¹⁰ on the basis of a report submitted by a special sub-committee of twenty-one members, that two forms of "isolation" be put into effect. The first, to which it applied the generic name "isolation", without further qualification, was the more far-reaching, and was reserved for the "enemies of the nation and socialism"; the second, which it called "exclusion", was to apply to those persons presumed to be "enemies of socialism", and was more limited in its scope and confined in duration to "the present stage of the building of socialism".

"Isolation" *par excellence* was defined as the act of "depriving [a person] of the exercise of the political rights established for the whole

¹⁰⁶ Committee, pp. 51, 144; Congress, meeting of 26 May 1962

¹⁰⁷ Committee, pp. 51-3, 56, 200-1

¹⁰⁸ Committee, p. 51, 144; Congress, meeting of 26 May 1962

¹⁰⁹ Committee, pp. 141-4, 184-5, 194-7

¹¹⁰ Full text in Committee, pp. 587-97; amendments, pp. 700-15

people". "Exclusion" was defined as "exclusion from participation in any political organization, at the base as well as in positions of leadership; and from leadership of the socialist formations affiliated with the political organization, such as syndicates, cooperative societies, unions, and professional societies".

"Isolation" (in its specific sense) was to apply to "the enemies of the people's social socialist revolution", who fall into five groups: persons convicted, by competent courts, of crimes against the nation; persons proved to have helped foreigners to dominate the country or to injure its interests; persons proved to have abused their influence, amassing riches at the expense of the people by illegitimate means; former ministers or others proved to have participated in falsifying election returns or abridging constitutional safeguards or political liberties; and members of the former royal family. On the other hand, "exclusion" was to be applied to "those whose interests might contradict the interests of the whole people at the present stage of the building of socialism", including persons whose shares in establishments, nationalized in accordance with specified laws, were transferred to public ownership, and persons whose land-ownership was restricted in accordance with the agrarian reform laws of 1952 or 1961.

The Committee recommended also that both forms of isolation remain in force, with respect to any person to whom they applied, until that person proved that he had become qualified for constructive participation in the building of socialism. It further recommended that a special committee be set up, to consider the application of those general descriptions to individual cases, and to consider appeals.

Finally, the Committee established two principles: That both forms of isolation are restricted in their application to the individuals directly concerned, and do not extend beyond them to their kin; and that isolation in either form does not prejudice the right of an individual to exercise the civil rights enjoyed by other citizens.

Under legislation then existing, some of the recommendations of the Committee were already in force. On 16 January 1962, a supplementary decree-law was issued, giving legal effect to the remainder of the recommendations. This law suspended "for ten years" (i.e. for the duration of the period of socialist conversion) "the exercise of political rights and all electoral rights, whether as regards trade unions, societies, councils, boards, or organizations" in respect of persons in the groups in question. On the following day, Nasser issued two more decrees: one exempting women and minors from the foregoing

provisions; and another setting up a committee to examine appeals and complaints.

In a summary account of the implications and provisions of the procedure of isolation and exclusion, Nasser described that procedure as ensuring that all socialist institutions remained out of bounds to persons who had been affected in their property holdings by the socialist laws, persons who had been placed under administrative surveillance, and persons convicted of crimes of a political nature.¹¹¹

In the course of the debate in the Preparatory Committee, advocates of the system of "isolation" advanced the following arguments in defence of the recommendations then under discussion: (1) That, as enunciated, the recommendations permitted, but did not compel, the isolation or seclusion of a person to whom a general description applied; (2) That the criteria were stated in general, objective terms, and therefore were not capable of arbitrary, subjective interpretation and application to individual cases; (3) That the indicated measures of isolation or exclusion would not be enforced in respect of any person until it was proved that a given criterion applied to him; (4) That the application of either form of isolation was confined to the individual person concerned, and would not extend to members of his family; (5) That certain exceptions to the rules – always favourable to the persons affected by them – were incorporated into the text of the recommendations; (6) That the opportunity for exemption was open, in respect of everyone who could show that the presumption that he was opposed to socialism was wrong; (7) That the right to appeal was recognized and safeguarded; (8) That the recommendations provided for automatic suspension of the rules, in respect of convicted persons who had been granted amnesty; (9) That the system was in any case temporary and subject to revision; and (10) That the purpose of the system was the protection of the revolution and the people from further setbacks, and not the retaliation against former exploiters for past exploitation.¹¹²

While the subject of "isolation" and "exclusion" was under discussion in the Committee – and no doubt by the public as well – Nasser disclosed in a public address that the total number of persons who fell into the various groups mentioned by the Committee was 7,300.¹¹³ Not all these persons actually suffered suspension of political and election rights, however. For, in the first place, the total figure cited by Nasser contained some duplication, arising from instances in which the

¹¹¹ *Unity*, p. 88

¹¹² *Committee*, pp. 597–631, 652–723

¹¹³ Speech, 23 December 1961

same person was affected by all, or by a combination of two or three, of the measures mentioned by the Committee: nationalization, sequestration, and restriction of land-ownership under the agrarian reform laws of 1952 and 1961. In the second place, there were two groups of persons who, while subject to those measures, did not enjoy the political rights affected by "isolation" or "exclusion," namely, minors and foreign property-owners, whether resident in the U.A.R. or not. And, in the third place, two other groups were to be exempted from the application of measures of "isolation" or "exclusion" by special decrees: women, by a presidential decree issued on 17 January 1962; and 1,259 persons individually exempted from suspension of political or electoral rights by two presidential decrees issued on 16 January 1963.

In the absence of more precise information about the number of duplications, general exemptions, and cases of automatic inapplicability, one can only guess at the number of persons who were actually "isolated" or "excluded"; but that number must have been appreciably less than the 7,300 mentioned by Nasser. In order to see this figure in perspective, it must be recalled that the number of votes cast in the elections for the National Assembly in March 1964 was about 7,000,000. Less than one-tenth of one per cent of the electorate was therefore barred from participation in the election of the Legislature as a result of the enforcement of the system of "political isolation".

In pondering the future of this system, one must recall that the socialist revolution has now weathered the storm of the autumn of 1961, under the impact of which the system was given the scope it now has. The National Assembly has been elected; its first session has already adjourned. Barring unforeseeable changes, the tenure of its members will last until March 1969.¹¹⁴ The Arab Socialist Union is already in existence; its General National Congress and General Committee will shortly be elected, with tenure extending into the 1970's.

This means that the present composition and the social and ideological complexion of the Legislature, which have been determined strictly in accordance with the provisions of the system of "political isolation" (and also the composition and complexion of the supreme authorities of the Arab Socialist Union, which will soon be similarly determined), will continue to obtain and to dominate the political scene until close to the end of the period of "socialist conversion" envisaged in the *Charter*. The purposes, for which the system of "isolation" in its present form was devised, have been fully served.

It is not unlikely that, under these circumstances, serious thought is

¹¹⁴ *Constitution* (1964), Article 51; *Assembly*, Article 4

now being given, or will be given in the near future, to the question whether the idea of "isolation", at least as it is now interpreted, should remain as a part of the theoretical structure of Nasser's socialism.

One can only conjecture about the outcome of such re-examination of the idea as is here postulated. Unless unforeseen setbacks interrupt progress towards greater self-confidence by the régime of "socialist democracy" in the U.A.R., the system of "political isolation" will probably be allowed, quietly and without fanfare, to lapse, after progressive relaxation in its application in the less important public formations.

Apart from the fact that the political advantages of the system have already been realized, grounds for the cautious optimism here expressed regarding the future of the system may be found in the developments which accompanied the opening of the National Assembly on 26 March 1964. Not only was the Emergency Law rescinded, and the régime of administrative surveillance abolished; but provision was made for compensation for the property sequestered in the autumn of 1961, and all political detainees were released. Nasser was even able to announce to the National Assembly, at its opening meeting: "I consider that this class [viz., "the enemies of the alliance of all working powers"] has been liquidated"¹¹⁵ – an assurance which indicates a radically different appraisal of the situation, and (it must be assumed) of the dangers implicit therein, from the statement written in the Charter less than two years earlier: "It is imperative that we reject the belief that we have been rid of reaction for ever; for reaction still possesses such material and intellectual influence as may tempt it to challenge the revolutionary tide."¹¹⁶

One cannot write with commensurate optimism about the prospects of relaxing, in the near future, the existing ban on political parties – partly because the roots of Nasser's bias against political parties are deeply embedded in his political experience and social outlook.

Nasser's distrust of political parties goes back to the earliest days of the revolution, and beyond. While still in high school, Nasser had joined the Young Egypt party, and abandoned it in disillusionment. Later on, he had joined the Wafd party, with the same results. Then he had conducted "probing contacts" with the Muslim Brotherhood, the Communists, the Liberal Constitutional party, and the Sa'adists – and had found them all wanting.¹¹⁷ As soon as the revolution broke

¹¹⁵ Speech, 26 March 1964

¹¹⁷ Committee, p. 272

¹¹⁶ Charter, ch. vi

out in July 1952, the young officers' suspicions about political parties were reconfirmed by the dispute (which erupted in August) over the agrarian reform laws, which the officers wanted to enact right away and the politicians and political parties wanted to avoid at any cost. Small wonder that, within less than six months from the overthrow of Farouk, all political parties were dissolved by the Revolutionary Command Council (on 16 January 1953).

There was little reason for Nasser's views on political parties to change, for better or for worse, in the years that followed; for no political parties were in existence in Egypt. Apart from the conspiracy against his life and the attempted assassination organized by the Muslim Brotherhood, Nasser's only direct experience with political parties since 1952 was in connection with the unification of Egypt and Syria in 1958. Nasser's relations, as President of the U.A.R., with the leaders of the Ba'ath party (officially in a state of auto-dissolution, but implicitly recognized to be still existing in a twilight zone between legality and illegality), instead of encouraging him to abandon or moderate some of his earlier misgivings about political parties, only served to confirm his suspicions and add a new dimension to his hostility to political parties as such. To his realization, early in life, that Egypt's traditional politicians and political parties were as short on vision, patriotism, and constructive idealism as they were long on selfishness and opportunism, was now added the belief that even parties which considered themselves ideological and progressive were not immune to petty factionalism and narrow partisanship. Much of Nasser's current outlook on political parties must therefore be attributed not to his concept of socialism but to these pre-socialist experiences of a man who appears never to overlook an experience or fail to draw general conclusions from the particular events of his life.

Nasser's views on the place of political parties in a socialist society must be reconstructed from passing hints and clues dispersed in his speeches and recorded conversations; in vain does one search Nasser's utterances for a thematic discussion of the question. (It may be observed in this connection that the *Charter* makes no mention of political parties, nor do the proposals on "The Political Organization of the Arab Socialist Union", except in a few passages where reference is made to the failure of pre-revolution political parties to provide the national struggle with inspiring, constructive leadership.)

A political party, Nasser apparently believes, must be one of four things: a class formation serving the interests of a particular class; or a grouping of politicians seeking office through the coordination of their

individual efforts and influence; or an organization based upon a doctrine which is alien in its source and inspiration, and/or linked to foreign leadership or foreign interests; or a group of people sharing common tendencies, with respect to the pace or methods of social change, within the framework of the national consensus on social objectives. Each of these possibilities can be seen, from Nasser's perspective, to be either harmful or superfluous. By a process of elimination, it becomes apparent that a socialist society in the process of becoming has no place for political parties, according to the logic of Nasser's views.

Parties which represent little more than the greedy desire of opportunist office-seekers for power, obviously have no place under socialism.

As for parties which represent alien doctrines and constitute in effect local branches of world-wide organizations with centres in foreign lands, their very existence is a sin, not only against socialism, but also against nationalism, in which it is rooted. They are satellites in the orbit of foreign nations, moved along pre-ordained courses not by their own power or will but by the forces emanating from outside the homeland. Theirs is the sin of treason, the most heinous of all sins according to the catechism of nationalism.¹¹⁸

Parties representing class interests may be representatives either of the exploiting classes or of the working classes. The former have no valid *raison d'être*. The latter, while legitimate in purpose, may be harmful in their approach, at least during the period of socialization. The legitimate interests of a "power of the working people" can be adequately served through existing socialist institutions. Day-to-day matters of a professional nature are better left in the capable hands of trade unions or other professional organizations, which the Arab Socialist Union does not supersede.¹¹⁹ Matters which involve major policy-decisions can be dealt with through the representatives of the class concerned in the Arab Socialist Union (at any of its organizational levels) or in the National Assembly – where all "working powers" are adequately represented and where everyone is supposed to be dedicated to the resolution of inter-class differences fairly, peacefully, and within the framework of national unity. Up to this point, it can be seen that parties representing individual "popular powers" are superfluous. But such parties may be harmful also. They may exacerbate, instead of reconciling, relations with other "popular powers". For a party by nature generates factionalism, Nasser maintains; and factionalism in one group provokes a similar response among all others. And a professional cadre of party officials and workers, or a party machine, in-

¹¹⁸ Compare: *Unity*, p. 193

¹¹⁹ Statute, "Introduction"

variably develops vested interests capable of creating strains in inter-group relations. A class-party official, under the influence of such factors, is less capable of viewing the legitimate interests of the class from the perspective of the larger interests of the nation, than is a class representative in popular political organizations which are predicated on the faith in the "alliance of all working powers" and dedicated to the common national interest which transcends the particular interests of any single group. Moreover, a "power of the working people" is not immune to the temptation of thinking in exclusive class terms or entertaining desires for domination; and a party representing such a group tends to promote and actualize such undesirable potentialities. Nasser, who often warns that socialism is as incompatible with the "dictatorship of the proletariat" as it is with the "dictatorship of capital" (as has been seen earlier), finds it necessary also to warn the trade unions against fancying themselves as class parties.¹²⁰

Regarding the fourth possible category of parties – namely, those which represent differences of accent or method against a background of belief in the common objectives – Nasser appears to have divergent views, depending upon whether he is thinking in short-range or in long-range terms, and whether he is referring to parliamentary parties or grass-roots parties.

In short-range terms, i.e. during the period of "socialist conversion", the emergence of such parties is premature: the urgent need is for promoting consensus regarding common objectives, and fostering national solidarity. Furthermore, such differences of views as may now exist among different members of the socialist institutions can be freely expressed and effectively defended within those institutions without there being any permanent alignments among like-minded individuals. It is the permanence of the alignment that is the crux of the matter. Similarity of views on some issues need not necessarily indicate similarity of views on all issues, as far as the same individuals are concerned; yet permanent alignments among individuals, caused by membership in political parties and intensified by party discipline, tend to constrain the individuals in question to support one another and follow the party leadership in respect of policies and views to which not every individual necessarily subscribes. Nasser's opposition to such permanent alignment is not confined to political parties within the nation; as is well known, it extends also to the behaviour of nations on the international stage. There is evident parallelism in Nasser's views on political parties and power-blocks. The reasoning behind his uncompromising

¹²⁰ Congress, meeting of 30 May 1962; Speech, 26 March 1964

opposition to the alignment of individuals in political parties (which, he maintains, makes their views on social and national problems rigid, pre-set, less amenable to reason, and less independent and spontaneous) is analogous to the reasoning behind his passionate and unyielding opposition to the alignment of nations in power-blocks, which, he believes, produces similar effects on the nations' international conduct.¹²¹

The useful functions which political parties, viewed as mass formations, may serve, such as the mobilization of the masses, the dissemination of information, the enhancement of interest in public affairs, can all be equally served by popular political organizations, like the Arab Socialist Union. Indeed, they may be thus served more effectively and with fewer attendant shortcomings. For (and this is an axiom of Nasser's social thought) a political party is by definition a minority party;¹²² and its educational efforts cannot have direct influence over the masses. The useful and legitimate functions of the least undesirable of political parties, therefore, can be better discharged (with no offsetting dangers) by popular political organizations.

However, Nasser does not rule out the possibility that, at some time in the future, the socialist U.A.R. may make some room for some kinds of political parties in its political life. Even this guarded admission of a distant possibility is not unconditional. Parties "serving the interests of a minority",¹²³ or class parties "of feudalists, capitalists, or workers",¹²⁴ or retrogressive parties that "call for the restoration of exploitation, the restoration of the dictatorship of capital, or the return of the English",¹²⁵ will under no circumstances be permitted to function under Nasser's socialism, now or in the future. It is only parties that represent relative differences in "tendencies" – "right, left or centre"¹²⁶ – that are not entirely precluded by Nasser's socialism in its post-conversion stage.

The chances for unrestricted political opposition and criticism, during the period of socialist transformation, are no better than the chances for political parties.

Opposition to methods of implementation or to some details of the programme of socialism may, and does, exist. So does relatively free

¹²¹ Compare Speech, 4 September 1961 (at the Belgrade Conference) with *Unity*, pp. 290-1

¹²² *Unity*, p. 88

¹²³ "Interview with Columbia Broadcasting System Television", 25 August 1961

¹²⁴ "Interview with Hamburg Television", 13 August 1961

¹²⁵ *Committee*, p. 278

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

criticism, within the socialist institutions, of individual measures and actions, as well as criticism of the conduct of individual officials or government departments. Like the Preparatory Committee and the National Congress of Popular Powers, the first session of the National Assembly in the spring of 1964 witnessed some criticism and dissent. The press, too, after prolonged initial hesitation, has lately begun to show less timidity in responding to the *Charter's* open invitation to "criticism and self-criticism" (which it declares to be "among the most important safeguards of freedom"¹²⁷ and a condition of "sound national building", giving "national action the opportunity to correct itself" – a service "most urgently needed in periods of successive change during revolutionary action"¹²⁸).

But Nasser's statements on the subject draw a clear line between criticism of, or opposition to, the objectives of socialism or the overall programme of socialization or the principal devices and institutions thereof, on the one hand, and criticism of individual methods of application, on the other hand. Opposition to the objectives of socialism is not mere opposition: it is treason.¹²⁹

Nasser also draws a dividing line between spontaneous opposition by individuals, and organized opposition by groups; and between opposition to some manifestations of state policy, and consistent opposition to governmental policies in principle. He shows little enthusiasm for the idea of "an organized opposition whose task and duty it is to oppose everything, be it right or wrong".¹³⁰

In the light of Nasser's expressed views and the known premises of his social thought, there appears to be little basis for the supposition that he might reconcile his concept of socialism with the principles of unrestricted criticism of, or organized opposition to, the objectives or programmes of socialism during the period of "socialist conversion".

Socialism may be sheltered from the winds of "reactionary" counter-revolution by the attempt to still those winds. The disarming of "reaction" through the procedures described in the foregoing paragraphs is calculated to protect the socialist system, during its period of frailty, by sheltering it from challenges from without.

In the final analysis, however, the real protection of socialism must come from within. It must be internally fortified, in order to be ren-

¹²⁷ *Charter*, ch. v

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, ch. viii

¹²⁹ *Committee*, p. 209

¹³⁰ "Interview with Hamburg Television", 13 August 1961; *Committee*, pp. 207-9

dered immune against the threats of direct assault or infiltration by "reactionary elements".

Nasser seeks to immunize socialism in this manner by seeing to it that those elements of society which have the biggest direct stake in the triumph of socialism are assured of at least half the seats of any elective socialist institution. In the *Charter*, he states:

"Political, popular organizations which are based on free and direct elections must, in equity and justice, represent the powers comprising the majority – the powers which have for long been exploited, which have a profound interest in the revolution, and which by nature and also by virtue of their long deprivation contain profound revolutionary driving forces."

"Apart from being right and just – as a representation of the majority – this provision guarantees that the driving revolutionary force shall be mighty, springing from its natural and genuine sources.

"Accordingly, the new Constitution must ensure for farmers and workers half the seats of popular and political organizations on all levels, inasmuch as they are the majority which has for a long time been deprived of its fundamental right to make and direct its own future."¹³¹

This provision, which has been described by Nasser as the most important provision of the *Charter*,¹³² has been incorporated into the Statute of the Arab Socialist Union,¹³³ the Law on the National Assembly,¹³⁴ the Union Accord,¹³⁵ and the 1964 Constitution.¹³⁶

Between its first enunciation in the *Charter* and its reiteration in the later documents, however, the idea underwent one not unimportant change, largely as a result of the discussions at the National Congress. Farmers and workers are now assured "at least one half" of the seats, whereas the *Charter* spoke of ensuring only "one half".

The seats which are reserved in advance for workers and farmers, furthermore, are actually intended for only a portion of the workers and farmers of the country. The definition of the members of the two groups who qualify to benefit from the arrangement (according to the "Report on the Charter" adopted by the National Congress) limits the reserved seats to those farmers who, along with their wives and dependent children, own no more than 25 *feddans* of agricultural land, (al-

¹³¹ *Charter*, ch. v

¹³² *Statute*, Article 19

¹³³ *Union*, "Political Constituents"

¹³² *Congress*, meeting of 26 May 1962

¹³⁴ *Assembly*, Articles 1, 2, 3, 13, 14, 15

¹³⁶ *Constitution* (1964), Article 49

though the agrarian reform law of 1961 permits land-holdings of 100 *feddans*) and to such workers as are eligible for membership in the labour unions. This means that other farmers and workers, while they may, like members of other "powers of the working people", contest the remaining 50 per cent of the seats, may not compete for the reserved half with the farmers and workers who fall under the foregoing definitions. For it is these farmers and workers who, under present circumstances, are under the greatest economic, cultural, and social disadvantages, and who therefore stand in greatest need of the guarantee provided by the system.

Apart from its political usefulness as a means of protecting socialism by immunizing it against possible infiltration by "reactionary elements",¹³⁷ this device is viewed also as a means of giving equal opportunity to the poorest elements of society for a fair share in political power in the socialist state.

In both respects, the need for this special arrangement need not extend beyond the present period of "socialist conversion" – the period in which the disarming of "reaction" remains necessary, and the establishment of social justice and the "dissolution of class distinctions" remain not fully accomplished.¹³⁸ For the time being, however, Nasser is convinced that nothing less than this arrangement can guarantee that those who have the biggest stake in the consolidation and triumph of socialism have an assured majority in the legislative bodies and popular political institutions of the socialist state.

If, for any reason, all these efforts to protect socialism fail, and if by one means or another "reaction" succeeds in regaining control over the National Assembly and the Arab Socialist Union – then what? Nasser replies: "I shall put on my khaki uniform, and start the revolution all over again."¹³⁹

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¹³⁷ *Congress*, meetings of 26 May and 23 May 1962; *Unity*, pp. 89, 196, 199–201

¹³⁸ *Congress*, meeting of 30 May 1962

¹³⁹ *Committee*, p. 201